

PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

1. How we approach the Bible

- a. Last time we looked at how the bible, although a collection of material written by many different people at different times, is one coherent whole – it is one story, and the storyline is consistent throughout. Therefore we have to approach the Bible, not as a reference book or training manual, but to see how we are caught up in this story, and how we can prepare for all that lies ahead of us.
- b. The content that we have in our bibles was originally written in one of three different languages – Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek.
 - i Translation from one language to another is not always an exact science, because some words and idioms that make perfect sense in one culture or language are completely meaningless when translated into a different language or culture.
- c. The translators of our bibles have the difficult task of communicating not just what the words are saying, but also what they are meaning. There are two approaches to translation that are used – word for word and thought for thought.
- d. With word for word, each word is translated as accurately as possible to convey the meaning behind each individual word. Examples: ESV and NKJ. They are helpful in determining what the text is saying.
- e. With thought for thought, translation is based on each phrase to try and convey the meaning of the words in a more idiomatic context. They bring out the meaning of the phrase as accurately as possible, interpreting the intent of the writer to express what is in his mind that he wants the reader to understand. Examples: NIV and CEV.
- f. Then there are the paraphrases that seek to make the text as user-friendly as possible, taking the general meaning of the text and putting it into colloquial English for ease of reading. Bibles like the NLT and The Message fall into this category.
- g. Another important factor is that the vast majority of the bible was written by Jewish people who have a Hebraic mindset and culture. We, in the western world are predominantly influenced by the largely logic- and conclusion-centred way of thinking of the Greek culture, heavily influenced by Greek philosophy.
- h. God has given us two trump cards to help us to get the most out of our Bibles.
 - i First, Jesus tells us in John 16:13 that “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” This is especially true for us as we study the end times as he says he will show us the things that are to come.
 - ii Secondly, he tells us in Hebrews 4:12 that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The very Word of God has power to challenge us, chastise us, and change us.

- i. We use some general principles when we approach the scriptures that help us to remain consistent in our understanding and application of what we read there.
 - i Scripture is taken in its literal sense unless the narrative or context say otherwise.
 - ii Numbers, times, events, seasons etc. are taken literally
 - iii Allegory and symbolism is only used when indicated in the text
 - iv We use scripture to confirm context and meaning
 - v The harmony of scripture must be maintained
 - vi The meaning of scripture is predicated upon its context, both locally and universally
- j. These principles are especially important when applying ourselves to studying the End Times, otherwise it is very easy to end up in realms of allegorical fantasy or misreading the signs of the times.